

Proposal

Title - Exploring the Relationship Between Spiritual Well-being and Combat Related Posttraumatic Stress

Program of Study – Clinical Mental Health Counseling

Presentation Type – Choose one of the following: PowerPoint

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Category – Choose one of the following: Experimental (Applied)

Abstract:

The United States military and clinicians alike are entering uncharted waters as both are faced with addressing what has quickly become an overwhelming number of combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnoses within its ranks, specifically in regards to combat veterans returning from campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. Several attempts have been made to address this problem through varying trainings, programs, and policies adopted by the Department of Defense. While these various approaches have attempted to address health and well-being in a more holistic manner than previous generations, a major gap in research and subsequent application still exists in regards to understanding how spiritual well-being constructs correlate to combat-related PTSD symptom severity. Spiritual well-being (SWB) is defined as the spiritual component of an individual's well-being that addresses meaning, purpose, and faith with both affective and cognitive evaluative elements. SWB is a critical component of overall health and a potentially powerful mediating factor in reducing the symptoms of various mental health issues including depression, anxiety, and coping with crisis. Research exploring the relationship between SWB and PTSD within the combat veteran population is severely lacking,

yet critically necessary in developing relevant and effective therapeutic interventions aimed at reducing PTSD symptoms. This vital research may also hold answers necessary in developing effective proactive measure and training that may act as a sort of stress inoculation prior to deployment. This presentation seeks to discuss current research efforts as well as future needs for research in this area with the goal of raising awareness, and creating a platform for dialogue. This discussion is delivered from the perspective of a veteran at ground zero, providing not only a quantitative call for research but also a qualitative and anecdotal call to action.

Christian worldview integration:

As a veteran, and current reserve component soldier, combat-related PTSD is not simply a research interest but rather a daily life struggle and reality. As a Christian, everything I navigate is done so through my Christian world-view. These two truths have created for me a marriage of struggling soldier and hopeful Christian. As I have progressed through my time within the military ranks, I have personally experienced how faith and an eternal perspective can mediate so many of the struggles veterans face, and answer so many of the questions that the military environment forces one to wrestle with. In regards to PTSD research, I have approached the topic not as a researcher looking from the top down, but rather a struggling soldier attempting to gain insight from the bottom up. In line with this perspective I have spent countless hours trying to find relevant and applicable ways to reach hurting veterans and deliver for them relief and hope. What better relief than the assurance and love of Christ? The military culture is a unique one, often proving difficult to reach and even more difficult to help in effective ways. I believe that taking a research-informed approach of exploring a clinical issue that is affecting countless and how that relates to spiritual well-being is a critical first step in reaching and helping this

population in a way that has been proven historically difficult if not impossible. Through properly conducted research, the military culture may be influenced to take an in-depth look at how spirituality contributes to the holistic well-being and health of its members. Furthermore, solid research will also legitimize the conversation on spirituality that is typically relegated to anecdotal conversations that are dismissive of value and benefit. The natural progression of creating a platform for dialogue about spirituality is potential conversations with a more pointed focus and direction, and that is Christ. Poorly delivered programs, incorrectly defined and measured constructs, and a social and cultural stigma have left the military culture a mission-field littered with some of America's finest patriots that are hurting and seeking answers. Regardless of any presentation that any one man may make, the larger issue at hand, one of millions of hurting veterans, should be brought into the spotlight at any opportunity. Simply stated, these are my brothers and sisters and I intend on fighting this fight alongside them, in a way that I can affect the fight. Just as Paul wrote in Philippians 2, it is critical that we act not only for our own needs, but rather with a Christ-like focus on the needs of others. Christ brought me through these battles, equipped me, and has sent me to help; and this is how I have been called to help.